



Content list available at www.urmia.ac.ir/ijltr

*Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research
(Book Review)*



Research Methods in Second Language Acquisition: A Practical Guide, Alison Mackey and Susan M. Gass (Eds.). Blackwell, Oxford (2012). 326 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4443-3427-2.

Karim Sadeghi ^{a,*}, Maryam Soleimani ^a

^a *Urmia University, Iran*

Research Methods in Second Language Acquisition: A Practical Guide, a collection of articles edited by Alison Mackey and Susan M. Gass, is intended as a guide for advanced and beginning researchers in language sciences. The bonus with this 'how-to-do' book is its pedagogical focus, with each paper providing a practical and step-by-step guide to the method it covers, often informed by reference to studies applying the method. Project ideas and resources as well as additional readings and brief summaries of studies appear at the end of each paper.

The book begins with the list of contributors followed by the introductory chapter by the editors. The volume consists of two parts and covers topics including data types, data coding, analysis, and replication in fourteen self-contained chapters, each authored by an experienced expert. An Index makes a closing to the book.

In the introductory chapter, 'Introduction', the editors briefly introduce core themes discussed in each chapter and give an overview of the book.

Part I, 'Data Types', consists of nine chapters. The main focus of the first chapter in Part I, *How to Use Foreign and Second Language Corpora*, is on learner corpus research. The types of learner corpus data and their contributions in three major facets of language, (i.e., frequency, variation, and co-text) are introduced. Moreover, the limitations of using naturalistic data and the dimensions along which learner corpora vary as well as main stages in learner corpus research (LCR) are discussed in detail. Readers with little or no prior knowledge on LCR will find this highly practical chapter a rich source of ideas and inspiration for their future research.

* Corresponding author: Urmia University, Iran
Email address: ksadeghi03@gmail.com

The second chapter by Tania Ionin, *Formal Theory-based Methodology*, examines data collection methods such as acceptability judgment, truth-value judgment, etc. used in formal, generative second language acquisition research, offering methodological and design guidelines. The chapter, tackling similar issues as in Mackey and Gass (2005), provides the reader with a good perspective on formal SLA studies.

The next chapter, *Instructed Second Language Acquisition*, gives a brief overview on ISLA with the main focus on “black box” (p. 54). It discusses descriptive studies on classroom observation and methods of analyzing and quantifying them. Also, some studies addressing the issues of L2 learning ranging from non-interventionist to interventionist quasi-experimental to action research with steps involved in performing them are reviewed.

How to Design and Analyze Surveys in Second Language Acquisition Research by Dörnyei and Csizer mainly describes how survey studies are carried out in SLA research and complements the book with a similar title by Dörnyei (2007). Having given a background to questionnaire surveys, it highlights the procedures to design a questionnaire; moreover, principles, sampling and data collection procedures as well as analysis and reporting survey results are discussed. The reviewers found this part extremely fruitful regarding the processes needed to conduct a survey study.

The aim of chapter 6, *How to Carry out Case Study Research*, is to define case study and to explain its features, strengths, goals, and general philosophy. Also, a brief overview of different waves of SLA case studies and steps involved in carrying them out are presented. This chapter proves highly informative in providing theoretical framework for doing a case study.

The importance of psycholinguistic methodologies in understanding the processes, mechanisms, and procedures underlying language comprehension and production is discussed in chapter 7 *How to Use Psycholinguistic Methodologies for Comprehension and Production*, by McDonough and Trofimovich. Different tasks regarding language comprehension and production followed by theoretical frameworks and methodological considerations are introduced. The article also discusses some ingenious studies on how people comprehend and produce language.

Methods of text analysis and writing process research are discussed by Polio in *How to Research Second Language Writing*. This chapter discusses the reasons for analyzing learners' texts and methods of studying learners' writing processes; furthermore, the steps involved in conducting experimental studies on writing are presented.

Chapter 9, *How to Do Research on Second Language Reading*, focuses on "a specification of the skills to be investigated and the linguistic requirement for their utilization" (p. 160) in L2 reading research. The paper also discusses how L1 and L2 linguistic knowledge jointly constrain L2 reading development and dual-language impacts on L2 reading development.

The last chapter in part I, *How to Collect and Analyze Qualitative Data*, explores qualitative inquiry as an approach to research in SLA. It begins with an overview of philosophical underpinnings (post-positivism and post-modernism), the definition of qualitative research and continues to introduce its characteristics and traditions, that is, ethnography, case study and conversation analysis

recognized by Chapelle and Duff (2003). It then proceeds step by step through the process of designing and conducting a qualitative research study and also offers a framework for evaluation and interpretation of data.

Part II, 'Data Coding, Analysis, and Replication', includes five chapters and offers advice on the procedures and methods involved in data coding, analysis, and replication. The first chapter in this part, '*Coding Second Language Data Validly and Reliably*', evaluates the concepts of validity and reliability in relation to coding. Moreover, sources of error that can threaten validity and reliability are introduced and types of coding and various steps involved in coding data are presented in detail. The author provides useful guidance on how to reduce and control for errors in the coding process.

Drawing upon technological advances, the chapter on '*Coding Qualitative Data*', by Melissa Baralt emphasizes the benefits of using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), especially NVivo software, in carrying out qualitative coding and analysis. Steps involved in coding qualitative data are discussed in detail. To further illustrate how qualitative coding is done, three studies using NVivo software for data analysis are presented. The chapter provides a goldmine of useful tips to start one's first CAQDAS with enough confidence.

'*How to Run Statistical Analyses*', by Jenifer Larson-Hall, is intended for readers who do not have much experience with statistics. In order to orient readers, it begins with discussing the statistical issues of hypothesis testing, *p*-value, sample size, effect size, and what data to present in statistical summary. Then, it focuses on helping the readers understand the most basic elements of *t*-test, ANOVA, Correlations and Chi-square and methods of conducting and reporting them; moreover, some links to a number of websites to perform basic statistical tests and information about the graphics which best summarize and illustrate the data for a particular test are provided. No matter how little one knows about statistics, this section will help him run a basic analysis independently.

Chapter 14, '*How to Do a Meta-Analysis*', outlines the major steps and key considerations in conducting and interpreting a meta-analysis. Three major problems with narrative reviews in SLA addressed by meta-analysis are introduced. In addition, the prominence and models of meta-analysis in the field of SLA as well as steps involved in carrying it out are discussed in enough detail paving the way for the novice researcher to proceed smoothly in the path of meta-analysis.

The last chapter of part II, '*Why, When, and How to Replicate Research*', is concerned with the concept of replication. Types of replication (exact, approximate and conceptual), key steps involved in choosing a study to replicate, selecting a replication type, and interpreting the results are discussed in appropriate detail. The amount of background information provided in most of the papers and in particular in the last two makes them digestible for readers with little knowledge of covered themes.

To conclude, this book provides much needed practical advice and theoretical background to novice as well as continuing researchers in the field of SLA. It can be judged as a very handy, up-to-date, and easy-to-digest book for all those who are new to the realm of language research. This book is a goldmine of information laid out in a very clear, straightforward and well organized format. All in all, this volume could be a valuable resource for prospective and practicing

researchers in the field of SLA and the fact that the contents of the book have been hand-picked by veterans in this area and that the volume has received positive reviews by world-known scholars in applied linguistics including Michael Long and Lourdes Ortega leaves little doubt about the appropriacy of such a conclusion. The editors could have achieved their goal much better, however, if they had opted to include papers on how to conduct research in other skills/sub-skills such as speaking, listening and vocabulary, not touched in the volume.

References

- Chapelle, C. A. & Duff, P. A. (2003). Some guidelines for conducting quantitative and qualitative research in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 163-178.
- Mackey, A. & Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: OUP.